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Digging Deep with Cynthia Brian

Pick a Peck of Harvest Homecoming

By Cynthia Brian



Sunflowers Photos Cynthia Brian

"Tickle it with a hoe and it will laugh into a harvest." English Saying

As kids, after a summer of utilizing the grape tanks as our private swimming pools, September ushered in the seriousness of harvesting in the vineyards. My entire family worked in the fields alongside the Mexican laborers picking grapes from dawn to dusk. The most exciting part of the day would be "the haul" when one of us would be chosen to accompany my dad to the winery pulling two tank trailers filled to the brim with Cabernet Sauvignon, Chardonnay, Merlot, Petite Sirah, Zinfandel, or Sauvignon Blanc, depending on which varietal had reached its peak sugar content. When the autumn weather was exceedingly hot, the hauls could be thrice a day. Often we didn't return to the farm until long after dark, yet my mom's table awaited, laden with a garden feast. On days when we weren't picking, we manned the fruit and vegetable stand selling just picked produce from our orchards as well as freshly laid eggs to the city slickers for pennies on the dollar.

Fall harvest! Could any two words evoke more delicious memories? From mouth-watering tomatoes to

plump purple eggplants, crisp tangy apples, and sunflowers

on the sundeck, September is a cornucopia of scrumptious freshness ripe with expectation. If you hoed a spring garden, or have been tending a fruit orchard for a few years, this is the season of plenty. For those of you who prefer to let others do the sowing and growing, I have prepared a list of some of the just-harvested produce for purchase from farmer's markets, corner stands, or your neighbors' kids.

- Grapes
- Blackberries
- Apples
- Figs
- Pears
- Plums
- White Peaches
- Nectarines
- Elderberries
- Raspberries
- Sweet Corn
- Tomatoes
- Sweet Potatoes
- Eggplants
- Peppers
- Tomatillos
- Zucchini
- Cucumbers
- Squash
- Olives
- Beets
- Beans
- Carrots
- Onions
- Horseradish
- Melons
- Lemons
- Quince

HARVEST STANDS

Your garden isn't producing these yummy indulgences? May I suggest a day trip to local farms. Tap into your inner farmer, grab your overalls, and head to the fields for farm fresh food. In Contra Costa County, a drive to Brentwood is your best resource. A Non-Profit Organization dedicated to educating the general public and "foodies" about farming and its products while improving Agri-tourism education in the Brentwood Region is Harvest Time. They publish the Farm Trail Map of U-pick locals as well as a harvest calendar. You'll be able to find your favorite produce ripe and ready in addition to flowers, condiments, nuts, and other goodies. Since there are over 40 farms to choose from, visit <http://www.harvest4you.com/> for more information.

About an hour north in Solano County, seasonal fruit and vegetable stands dot the country roads with local farmers providing the just picked pleasures.

Cal Yee Farms
5158 Clayton Road, Suisun Valley
(707) 425-5377
www.calyee.com (Open year-round)

Erickson Ranch Produce Stand & Dahlia Garden
2482 Cordelia Road, Suisun Valley
(707) 864-0557
www.ericksonranch.com (Seasonal: June-November)

Larry's Produce
Corner of Suisun Valley and Ledgewood Roads, Suisun Valley
(707) 864-8068 (Seasonal: June-December)

Parker Farms
2991 Rockville Road, Suisun Valley
(707) 422-2915 (Seasonal: July-October)

FYI, Cal Yee and Larry's Produce are my personal favorites. Venture across the bridge to Sonoma County where the back roads are strewn with homegrown stalls. These modern day produce stands are a far cry from my childhood rustic two saw horses buttressing a plank of plywood creation, yet they offer field to table freshness and flavor you won't find anywhere except in your personal potager.

Whether you want to eat fresh, can, freeze, dry, make sauces, pies, cobblers, cider, jellies, or jams, load up your wagon this is the month with ranch indulgences. Like the squirrels gathering acorns, jumpstart your winter stores with the nutrients and essence of healthy crops. With the harvest homecoming, it's time to pick-a-peck to make those pickled peppers. Hmmm, hmmm good! Bon appetite.

Cynthia Brian's Gardening Guide for September

"I don't want to get to the end of my life and find that I lived just the length of it. I want to have lived the width of it as well." Diane Ackerman

From pre-school to grad school, class is back in session. Where did the summer go as we were having fun in the sun? The good news is that with all the fresh, juicy, ripe fruits and vegetables available in September, our kids can enjoy a delicious and nutritious home-packed lunch. Autumn is harvest time and everyone benefits from the length and width of life. Make sure to bring the family to the Moraga Pear and Wine Festival on Saturday, September 29 to savor pear pies, local wines, and fresh fruits. Stop by the Be the Star You Are!(r) charity booth where our teens will be hosting a live radio show and I'll be talking dirt with you. Until then, let's eek out the last buds and blooms of the sunshine season before we begin putting our gardens to bed for a long winter's nap.

- TIME to feed irises with a low-nitrogen, well-balanced fertilizer. Don't overfeed and keep the fertilizer away from the rhizomes.
- DRESS up your fall patio by taking advantage of plant and furniture sales at local retailers.
- STRETCH before using your green thumbs as all the pulling, bending, twisting, and lifting require warmed muscles.
- GRILL your home-grown tomatoes adding inner SPF for the hot days of September. The antioxidant plant pigment, lycopene, increases skin's resistance to harmful UV rays.
- FEED and water our flying friends by keeping feeders filled with high quality seeds and fresh water in the fountains and birdbaths.
- GROW plenty of lettuce and spinach. Not only are they tastier straight from your garden, research has found that skin cancer survivors who munch these nutritious greens are less likely to have reoccurrences.
- PREVENT cataracts by eating at least five to nine servings of colorful fruits and vegetables daily. Both lutein and zeaxanthin have been found to help protect against eye diseases, which can be caused by oxidative stress and solar damage to the lens of the eye.
- SOW individual cloves of garlic this month, allowing them to sprout into scallions. Mulch and overwinter them to develop into full garlic bulbs by spring.
- FILTER volatile organic compounds (VOC's), like formaldehyde and benzene, found in many homes and offices by bringing in the natural air cleaners: houseplants!

- RECYCLE your plastic bags at Lafayette's Whole Foods this month and donate the five cents to a local charity. It's the Nickels for Non Profits Program to clean up our environment!
- DELIVER stress relief to yourself by spending more time in the garden. A recent survey conducted by the Nursery and Landscape Association found that a major reason people gardened was to escape the real world and get closer to God through nature. Gardening has its blessings!
- CHECK out the Lamorinda Winegrowers Association to purchase locally grown grapes and wines and receive information on vineyard harvesting notices.
<http://www.lamorindawinegrowers.com/>
- FERTILIZE in fall with nitrogen, phosphorus, potassium, and calcium. The first three nutrients are found in most mixed fertilizers, and calcium can be purchased separately in the form of limestone.
- TOSS the chopped leaves of baby carrot tops, peas, radishes, broccoli, and cauliflower into your salad or tabouli. Do not eat parsnip or potato tops as they are toxic.
- REDUCE inflammation from sprains and sunburn by planting comfrey. Steep fresh leaves in boiling water, strain, cool, then soak the sprained or sunburned areas in the cool tea to reduce pain, discomfort, and promote healthy skin rejuvenation.
- ATTEND The National Heirloom Exposition and World's Pure Food Fair in Santa Rosa, California, September 11, 12, and 13 with over 3,000 varieties of heirlooms and seeds from farms and gardens across America with proceeds benefiting school gardens.
- SELECT bulbs for spring blooms. Tulips need to be refrigerated six weeks before planting. Peruse your garden centers and catalogues for a kaleidoscope of narcissi, crocus, galanthus, iris, hyacinths, scilla, fritillaria, anemone, and more. Two of my favorite beauty in bulb catalogues are John Scheepers, www.johnscheepers.com and Van Engelen, www.vanengelen.com
- VISIT the Lamorinda Weekly booth at the Lafayette Art and Wine Festival on Sunday, September 16 between 4-6pm, enjoy a glass of wine and ask me your garden questions. Let's toast the harvest!

See you at the festivals. Celebrate the harvest homecoming and the final days of summer. Raise your glass!

Happy Gardening to You!

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I am available as a speaker, designer, and consultant.



Melons-cucumbers



Peppers and poppies

Reach the reporter at: info@lamorindaweekly.com

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